

commonalities and make law here, and, up to now, our Democratic colleagues have declined to do that.

Remember, their side said in March this pandemic was “a tremendous opportunity to restructure things to fit our vision.” So when Republicans tried to pass commonsense relief measures in July, in September, and in October, as well, our Democratic colleagues actually blocked policies they do not even oppose.

It has been heartening to see a few hopeful signs in the past few days. After months of arbitrary attachment to sky-high dollar amounts that the Speaker of the House claimed were essential—that it would be an insult to settle for a nickel less—those baseless claims have suddenly evaporated.

That is at least movement in the right direction, but the underlying reality is still with us. There are many important policies that have strong bipartisan support. There are many others that do not, and the way to help the country is for our Democratic colleagues to finally let the former group be signed into law while we keep arguing over the rest.

The targeted second round of paycheck protection that we have been trying to establish since July would help a huge number of small businesses survive to the finish line and help huge numbers of workers to keep their jobs. And it can pass the Senate today, probably with 95 votes.

With the apparent success of Operation Warp Speed, it makes no sense to skimp on the systems to distribute and deliver vaccines around the country. Those funds could pass the Senate today, possibly unanimously.

University presidents have made it clear they need certainty for their reopenings. Let me say that again. University presidents have made it clear they need legal certainty for their reopenings. That shouldn't be partisan. Liability protections should be able to pass the Senate today.

A number of our Democratic colleagues have focused especially on several of the unemployment relief programs that are set to expire in a matter of days. I specifically made sure to include those programs in my framework a few days ago. That extension could pass the Senate today.

The House of Representatives is spending this week on pressing issues like marijuana—marijuana—you know, serious and important legislation befitting this national crisis. But here in the Senate, I put forward a serious and highly targeted relief proposal including the elements which we know the President is ready and willing to sign into law. Why should these impactful and noncontroversial life preservers be delayed one second longer?

At long last, let's do what Congress does when we want an outcome. Let's make law on all the subjects where we agree and on all the areas where President Trump is ready to sign bipartisan relief into law.

I promise, our deep differences will still be here to debate. Our disagreements will be right where we left them. But do you know what can't wait? What can't wait are American workers, American small businesses, K-12 schools, the vulnerable Americans and frontline healthcare workers for whom speedy vaccine distribution will literally be a life-or-death matter.

Yesterday, my home State of Kentucky experienced yet another dreadful—dreadful—record-setting day. But Kentuckians also know that hope is in sight. Our State's workers are standing by at the UPS Worldport in Louisville and the DHL Express American Hub in northern Kentucky, key logistics centers that will play crucial roles in sending vaccines all around the country.

Our people are hurting, but they are ready to finish this fight. Congress should not keep them waiting for reinforcements that should have arrived literally months ago.

So compromise is within reach. We know where we agree. We can do this. Let me say it again. We can do this, and we need to do this. So let's be about actually making a law.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BARASSO). Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Christopher Waller, of Minnesota, to be a Member of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System for a term of fourteen years from February 1, 2016.

Mr. MCCONNELL. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I was pleased that the Senate unanimously agreed yesterday to proceed to conference on the 2021 National Defense Authorization Act.

The NDAA is one of the most important pieces of legislation that we pass here every year. It is the bill that authorizes funding for our troops and lays out our defense priorities.

Like the last two NDAA's, this year's bill focuses on restoring military readiness and ensuring that our Nation is prepared to meet threats posed by major powers like Russia and China.

In November of 2018, the bipartisan National Defense Strategy Commission released a report warning that our readiness had eroded to the point that we might struggle to win a war against a major power like Russia or China, and the Commission noted that we would be especially vulnerable if we were ever called on to fight a war on two fronts.

Over the past 2 years, we have made real progress on restoring military readiness, but we still have more work to do.

This year's National Defense Authorization Act continues our investment in ensuring that our military is prepared to meet current and future threats in any domain.

Of course, no matter what weapons or tanks or planes we have, our greatest military resource will always be our men and women in uniform, and this year's NDAA invests in improving the quality of life for our military members and their families. The bill supports a 3-percent pay raise for our troops, and it builds on previous measures to improve military healthcare and housing. It will also provide support for our military families in areas like childcare and professional development for military spouses.

As I said, this bill is one of the most important measures that we pass every year, and we need to make sure that we pass the final version of this legislation before Christmas. Failing to pass this legislation would send the wrong message to our troops and our allies and to our adversaries.

While this may not be a perfect bill, it contains a lot of important provisions to rebuild our military and to give our men and women in uniform the tools they need to defend our Nation. We need to pass it as soon as possible.

TRIBUTE TO MICHAEL ENZI

Mr. President, yesterday afternoon, MIKE ENZI delivered his farewell address. While MIKE has more than earned his retirement over a long and dedicated career in Washington and in Wyoming, we are going to miss him here in the U.S. Senate.

MIKE is an accountant and spent years as a small business man, and he brought that background and common sense to Washington, DC, with him.

In many ways, he has been the conscience of the Senate on spending issues, reminding us that we don't have an unlimited amount of money to spend and that every dollar we add to the debt is a burden that will have to be met by our children and grandchildren.